



## INSIDE INDIA

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### Celebrating the Girl Child

To combat the alarming decline in the number of girls born in India every year, the Government of India's Ministry of Women and Child Development, declared January 24 national "Girl Child Day". Launching a sustained campaign, the government is focusing on some of the root causes of a child sex ratio that is unbalanced: female feticide, domestic violence, and malnutrition. In addition to TV spots, advertisements, and school lessons advocating gender equality, the Ministry will organize several activities leading up to March 8, International Women's Day. January 24th was specifically chosen to coincide with the date former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the first female PM of India, was sworn into office.



Indian girls at school in a USAID supported education project. *Photo: Anita Khemka*

The 2001 census documented a steady decline in the national child sex ratio (CSR) from 962 girls to 1,000 boys in 1981 to a dismal count of just 927 girls to 1,000 boys in 2001. In Rajasthan, one of the worst affected areas, the CSR is an alarming 906 girls for 1,000 boys. As part of its Women's Legal Rights Initiative, USAID/India is working in Rajasthan reverse this trend. USAID supports research, advocacy, and outreach initiatives designed to change attitudes and to improve the status of the girl child.



In a celebration usually reserved for boys, a grandmother beats a thali (metal plate) to celebrate the birth of a girl. *Photo: USAID*

As a result of USAID funded programs, community leaders, both women and men, have emerged as very strong advocates for protecting the girl child and have addressed the once taboo subject of sex-selective abortions at religious gatherings and conventions. They have also developed outreach material to reach a wider audience. Working with local self-governance institutions, the community leaders have introduced small but very significant changes in the community, such as celebrating the birth of girls, counseling families, and acknowledging families of girls during traditional festivals and public events. In addition, community leaders ensure 100% birth registration and access to health services for mothers and children.

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With the support of the self-governance institutions, community leaders also provide a watchdog role in monitoring medical practitioners who provide sex-selective abortion, which is prohibited by Indian law. At the policy level, as an outcome of USAID supported research, a state level Technical Support Cell (TSC) and district level cells have been set up to improve the implementation of the law prohibiting sex-selected abortion. The Government of Rajasthan is supporting the state chapter of Indian Medical Association to conduct workshops with doctors across Rajasthan to sensitize them to gender issues. USAID/India plans to continue to support government efforts at the national and state level to protect girls.

## UNICEF State of the World's Children 2009 Report

With 78,000 women dying from preventable complications of childbirth and one million newborns dying every year, India was featured prominently in the annual UNICEF report on the *State of the World's Children 2009*, released, with much media attention in India, on January 15, 2009. Dr. Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, Member of the Planning Commission of the Government of India, launched the report and called on all partners to advocate for improved maternal and neonatal health. For many years, USAID has been working in India to improve maternal and child health with key evidence based and sustainable interventions which address the same issues of mortality and morbidity raised in the UNICEF report.

The *State of the World's Children 2009* highlights the intrinsic link between the health and survival of mothers and their infants and explores recent trends in India. Unfortunately, maternal mortality rates have not shown improvement in certain regions of India and avoidable complications during childbirth kill approximately 78,000 Indian women every year, which in turn puts their newborns at risk. India alone accounted for 22 per cent of the global maternal deaths. An Indian woman is 300 times more likely to die in childbirth or from pregnancy-related complications than women in the U.S. and for every mother who dies, 20 others suffer pregnancy-related illnesses. Additionally, slightly more than half of Indian women deliver their babies at home, which contributes to maternal mortality and morbidity, and a full quarter of the world's unattended deliveries take place in India.



Mother and child. Photo: UNICEF

The state of Uttar Pradesh illustrates the problem in many Indian states: with 517 deaths per 100,000 live births, it has a maternal mortality rate similar to that of Sudan (550 per 100,000 live births). Two-thirds of the maternal deaths in India occur in nine Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh (UP), Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, the three main recipients of USAID and child health funds (approximately \$27 million in 2008), with UP a particular focus state for USAID health programming.

Although India has made significant progress reducing the mortality rate for children under age five from 117 deaths per 1,000 live births to 72 over the past 17 years, one million newborns (babies under 28 days) still die every year, many from treatable causes. A child born in India is 14 times more likely to die during the first 28 days of life than one born in the U.S. USAID interventions to reduce infant and child deaths include birth spacing, routine immunization, nutrition, and newborn care. As Dr. Hameed stated when releasing the report, "women and children make up about two-thirds of the population of India and their well being is essential to

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our development.” India’s contribution to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals of reducing the under five mortality rate and reducing the maternal mortality rate provides further incentive to focus on these crucial health matters.

For more information, the full report is available at: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc09/>

## Urban Flooding Workshop: A Successful U.S. India Collaboration

The Indian monsoon brings heavy rains and flooding every year which kill, on average, 1,000 to 3,000 persons and can affect up to 30 million people. In the past four years, major cities in India, including Mumbai, have experienced serious flooding killing thousands of people, affecting millions, and causing huge economic losses. With estimates that over 600 million people will be living in metropolitan areas in India by 2021, finding better ways to deal with the special features of floods in urban areas is crucial.



Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) John Paul Woodley, Jr. and NDMA Member, M.S. Reddy discuss urban drainage problems in Hyderabad

Photo: Kapil Gupta

An international workshop on *National Guidelines for Urban Flooding Disaster Management: Scientific, Technological, and Administrative Challenges* was held recently in Hyderabad to highlight these issues. An excellent example of interagency coordination, the workshop was sponsored by the Government of India’s National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), under the auspices of the USAID Disaster Management Support (DMS) Project, organized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and funded by the Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid program of the U. S. Pacific Command (USPACOM).

U. S. Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) John Paul Woodley, Jr, led the U.S. delegation. More than seven experts from USACE and the Association of State Flood Plain Managers participated in a lively exchange of

information with approximately 70 Indian government officials, university professors, and practitioners on strategies and techniques to reduce vulnerability to urban floods. A field trip organized by the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation provided valuable insight into the realities that urban planners and managers face while trying to address the issue of urban flooding.

The workshop concluded with a solid agreement to continue discussions between India and the U.S. and Assistant Secretary Woodley invited a delegation from NDMA to attend the April Senior Leadership Seminar, which is held by USACE and FEMA before each U.S. hurricane season. The NDMA and USACE will also arrange a study tour to USACE facilities in the United States and the NDMA and USACE will explore additional areas of potential collaboration. Signaling the first time international expertise has been called upon to contribute to NDMA guidelines, the U.S. delegation’s contribution to the workshop will be used in the finalization of the NDMA’s guidelines for Urban Flood Management.